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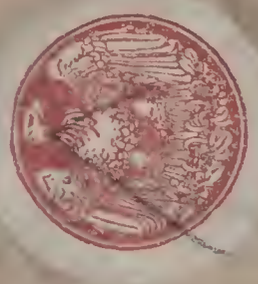

Maj. William R. Brown,

18th N. H. Vols.

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MAJOR WILLIAM I. BROWN.

A SKETCH:

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MAJOR WILLIAM I. BROWN.

William Ide Brown, the son of John S. and Deborah (Ide) Brown, was born in Attleborough, Mass., August 27, 1839. In 1843 his parents removed to Fisherville, N. H., which was his home from that time. His early life was as uneventful as that of the majority of village boys. He was not a strong, robust child, but small in stature and of delicate health. He eagerly embraced all the opportunities for education that the village afforded, in the public and private schools.

Wishing for a more thorough and extended course of education, in 1855 he entered the academic department of the New London Literary and Scientific Institution, at which place he spent three years in preparing for college. After much serious thought and reflection on the subject, he made a public profession of his faith, and on June 7, 1857, was baptized, and joined the First Baptist Church in Fisherville, and continued an active member till his death. I believe, from this time, it was his earnest endeavor to live a Christian life;—how successful he was, I leave others to say.

A college friend thus writes: "He was one who made many friends, and I don't know that he ever lost one. His purity of life was unquestioned, and he came forth from the ordeal of city college life without even the smell of fire on his garments. He was throughout a consistent Christian."

His college historian says,—"But his highest aim while in

college was to lead an upright Christian life. That life may not have conformed to the ideal that was ever before him—it probably did not; but it was an unselfish life—a life without stain. He would have every one know that he was a Christian; his daily life should attest the sincerity of his profession;—moreover, he would array himself with the Christian men of his college. Accordingly, on entering the University, he at once enrolled his name on the books of the Religious Society. There are those who have not yet forgotten the earnest simplicity of his words, when, soon after his matriculation at one of the meetings of the society, he spoke of his previous Christian life, and of his anticipations respecting the work to which he had consecrated himself."

The Colonel, under whom he served two years, testifies to his excellent moral character, and that "he had most successfully resisted the temptations incident to army life."

Shortly after his conversion, he conceived it to be his duty to enter the ministry, and from that time his education was directed to that end. For ought that I know, he held that resolve intact till the day of his death. His pastor thus writes of him, in regard to this: "Amid the trials and temptations of student life, beyond the smoke and carnage of the battle-field, he held his sacred calling steadily in view, and felt that necessity was laid upon him; yea, wo was unto him if he preached not the gospel. He cherished no romantic ideas of the pulpit as a means of winning popular applause, or the pastor's study as a stepping-stone to ease and literary culture; he had deliberately chosen the ministry of reconciliation as his work for life, and looked forward to it with deep and settled convictions of duty, rather than enthusiastic anticipations of success."

Graduating with honor at New London, he entered Brown University in the fall of 1858, and for four years pursued the regular collegiate course.

As a scholar, though above the average, he did not aspire to or take a high rank. In a letter, he says,—"I do not think that either my health or my abilities warrant me in aiming for the highest honors." Notwithstanding this, he received appointments both for Junior Exhibition and Commencement.

His genial nature won for him the regard not only of his class, but the men of other classes. During his last year in college he was elected president of his class — the highest honor they could confer, as the appointment was for life.

Of slight frame and impaired health, he was conscious of the necessity of strengthening his constitution by physical exercise, and entered with zest into the college sports, spending what time he could spare in the gymnasium, or rowing on the river (he having early joined the college boat club, a connection he retained throughout his college course). He little dreamed of the inestimable value the time thus spent would be to him hereafter.

The outbreak of the war found him quietly pursuing his studies. Many of the collegians enlisted in the first regiments that volunteered, and in his letters he made frequent mention of the patriotic feeling which pervaded the University. April 17, 1861, he wrote,—"To-night, as I see the streets thick with uniforms, it begins to seem like war. The excitement here is intense. I hope New Hampshire will furnish her quota of troops in season." And with pride he refers to the fact that Brown University, with less than half the number of students that were at Yale, had furnished more volunteers.

In May, 1861, a military company was formed in college, called the "University Cadets," and he was among the first to place his name on the roll, and there received his first military instruction.

May 20, 1861, he went to Boston to witness the departure of the 2d N. H. Vols. for the seat of war; and, proud of the rep-

resentatives of the Old Granite State, he wrote,—"I felt as if I could give them all a hearty shake of the hand and a 'God bless you!' I was most agreeably disappointed in the appearance and discipline of the men. As the representative of New Hampshire here, I have had to stand not a little of bluster and slurring on account of her slowness in sending out troops. I have not been posted at all in regard to her movements or her soldiers, and accordingly have had to bear it all. But now I can stand up for the Granite State with an intelligent and patriotic feeling."

As yet he had not felt it to be his duty to enlist. We all cherished the opinion that a few weeks' campaign would make an end of civil strife, and his thoughts were still turned to his life-work.

But the Peninsular campaign, in the early summer of 1862, put an end to all hopes of a speedy termination of the war, and the question of his duty to his country arrested his attention.

July 2, 1862, writing of relatives in the service, he says,—"I wish I could have the results in my character of such experience. That is what will toughen, will develop, will strain every energy of being, will make a man more a man. There is something so noble in this absorbing of little selfish interests in one great one! Before a man can sincerely and intelligently give himself a ready sacrifice to his country, his whole nature must pass through an ordeal that cannot but raise him in the scale of being. I do not mean that a patriot will long continue to balance his own interests and his country's before he will decide for the latter; but that true patriotism is something more than mere impulse, mere ignorance of the cost, mere indifference. It is the result of a rational, settled conviction that the country needs great sacrifice, and is worthy of it. The patriotism of the country is going to have another test, by

raising three hundred thousand more men. Who won't have to go, who can?"

Soon after writing this he left Providence for the vacation preceding commencement, when he should leave college. Nothing remained to complete his college course but delivering his graduating oration.

He bade adieu to his classmates, little thinking that with most of them the separation would be final. He had made all preparations for completing his education at the Newton Theological Institution, even to engaging his room. But at home, in the vacation, the need of the country for more men was ever in his mind, and the question, "Who can go?" was soon answered by him, "I will go,"—thus giving up all his cherished plans for the future.

I doubt if a man enlisted in the state to whom a soldier's life was more distasteful naturally than to him. His habits, training, aspirations, all led him towards an entirely different life: but when his duty was plain to him, waiving all obstacles, he cheerfully accepted the new life, and henceforth devoted himself wholly to his new profession.

He at once began recruiting for the 9th N. H. Vols., then forming at Concord, and, on the organization of the regiment, was appointed second lieutenant in Co. K., his commission dating from August 10, 1862.

The regiment left the state August 25, and, arriving at Washington, went into camp at Arlington Heights. Shortly after their arrival the battles of the second Bull Run and Chantilly were fought, followed by the advance of Lee into Maryland. The demand for troops was so urgent, that the regiment (which had been assigned to the 2d Div., 9th A. C.) was pushed on in pursuit of Lee.

With little experience in drill and none in the hardships of an active campaign, destitute of tents and camp equipage, the

conduct of the regiment was worthy of all praise. Lt. Brown writes, September 11,—"The men are in good spirits and eager for a fight. I used to wonder how men could get so anxious, but I see now. We may be called into action soon. If so, I hope we shall do well. I am ready and waiting to go where duty calls, God only knowing my fate."

Their expectations were soon realized, for on the 14th (only three weeks from home) they took their share of the honor in the battle of South Mountain, charging up the slope, and driving the enemy before them.

On the 18th they were again engaged, at Antietam, being stationed opposite the famous "stone bridge," which they helped to carry by storm, and the defence of which was assigned them that night. The regiment lost heavily in the action, nearly 100 being killed and wounded.

After the battle, the regiment enjoyed a few weeks of comparative rest. Early in October, crossing Elk Ridge, they moved to Pleasant valley. Lt. Brown thus writes of the President's proclamation: "I still hold that the enforcement of the constitution is the direct object for which we contend; but I should feel that peace would be premature, if it should leave the slavery question as it now is. I should regard it as a calamity if the armed violence that threatens the constitution should be removed without removing the underlying cause. I hope we are now doing the fighting for centuries to come."

I again quote, from another of his letters, as indicative of his unfaltering purpose,—"No one would more gladly welcome an unconditional surrender on the part of the Confederacy than I would, but better a few more lives should be sacrificed than that the past sacrifice should be in vain. The length of life is not determined by our years, but by what we do. Death on the battle-field, with all its horrors, is prefera-

ble to slavery to unjust principles; a short life of freedom and honor, better than a long one of servitude and disgrace."

Writing after the battle of Antietam, he says,—"Many a time during the past year, under the influence of excitement and inspiriting music, I have thought I could march with fortitude up to the cannon's mouth: but such feelings under such circumstances are not to be trusted. On the battle-field there is no music but the roar of cannon, the hissing of shells, and the hum of bullets. There is nothing very inspiriting about this, I assure you. One must then draw upon the courage of principle; it must be the result of careful counting of the cost and a determination to meet the worst, and, if it does not come, to count it all as so much gain, as so much more than was to be expected."

I give these extract from his letters, comrades, to show clearly the sentiments which inspired him amidst the dangers and discomforts of active service. In all his letters home he was careful to write nothing that would unnecessarily alarm his friends, ever speaking of his own adventures with extreme reticence. There are no tales

> "——of most disastrous chances;
> Of moving accidents by flood and field;
> Of hair-breadth 'scapes i' the imminent deadly breach;"

and if he alluded to the hardships, it was generally in a playful manner.

On the 13th of December, the regiment was engaged in the fearful slaughter at Fredericksburg, losing heavily.

In January, 1863, Lt. Brown was taken sick with a slow fever, the result of exposure, and remained in the general hospital at Aquia Creek till his health was restored, joining the regiment at Newport News just before they followed Burnside to Kentucky. In this new field they had a delightful experience compared with their campaign in Virginia. The duty was

light (guarding the railroads and bridges against guerrillas), and, with comfortable quarters and abundant provisions, they soon recuperated. While there, Lt. Brown received a first lieutenant's commission, dated March 1, 1863, and was transferred to Co. B.

They were not destined to remain long in Kentucky, the Ninth Corps being ordered to report to Gen. Grant, then investing Vicksburg. Leaving Kentucky, June 4, they went by rail to Cincinnati, and thence down the river on transports to their destination at Haines Bluff, on the Yazoo river, and to the duty assigned them of guarding the rear of Grant's army, then threatened by Johnston. For two months the troops suffered severely, the weather being extremely hot, the water very unwholesome, and scanty rations and long marches the order of the day. After the fall of Vicksburg, they joined in the pursuit of Johnston, participating in the siege and capture of Jackson, Miss., and then returning to their old camp on the Yazoo.

July 25, 1863, Lieut. Brown writes,—"We have had a long, hard march. Many died by the wayside from exhaustion. Rations were scarce, roast corn being our main dependence; water very bad and scarce." Yet, amid all these privations, he bore up wonderfully. He was now receiving the benefit of the hours spent in the gymnasium and on the Seekonk river. On the 10th of August they returned to Kentucky. The Ninth Corps went to the aid of Burnside, then at Knoxville, Tenn., but the brigade to which the 9th N. H. belonged, being much reduced by sickness, were ordered to remain in Kentucky, the regiment having their head-quarters at Paris.

November 1, 1863, Lieut. Brown was commissioned as Adjutant of the regiment. In February, 1864, they were ordered to Knoxville; remaining there but a few days, they returned to Kentucky, and thence to Annapolis, Md., remaining there

until April 23, when they received marching orders, and set out for Washington, joining the army of the Potomac in the famous campaign of 1864. The regiment was not engaged at the Wilderness, but at Spottsylvania they suffered terribly, losing over 200 men. They also took part in the battles of North Anna and Bethesda Church.

He writes at this time,—"Every one is cheerful and confident. O how I wish the people of the North could witness the earnestness and determination of the campaign, the endurance of the soldiers, marching all night and fighting all day, sometimes with nothing to eat but the corn left by the mules."

Arriving at Petersburg, they passed their time in the trenches. Of the life during those months it is unnecessary for me to speak: you who were there know the whole story. He writes at this time,—"I have full as strong a desire to resume my studies as I had one year ago, but I can't leave honorably while the campaign lasts. I will see the war through before I think of any other duty."

On the 30th of July, at the explosion of the "Mine," the regiment again distinguished itself, being among the first to enter the "Crater," and sustaining a loss of 92 men, or one half their number. Early in September, his health shattered by the exposure and hardships of life in the trenches, Adjutant Brown came home on sick leave. While here he was offered, and accepted, the position of Major in the 18th N. H., then organizing at Concord, the commission dating from October 13, 1864. An officer of the 9th N. H., urging his promotion, thus wrote: "Since the regiment entered the service, Adjutant Brown has been with it in every battle, skirmish, and march, and, by the fidelity with which he has performed every duty devolving upon him, has won the high esteem and admiration of every officer in the regiment. He is brave, cool, and judicious under fire. When it was proposed to confer the

rank of Brevet Major upon the officer who had conducted himself with the most conspicuous gallantry during the campaign, Adjutant Brown's name was the one most prominently mentioned."

Major Brown joined his regiment in November, 1864. They were stationed at City Point, Va., attached to the Engineer Corps, and during the winter were hard at work on the fortifications, building roads, &c., relieved only by an occasional march to the front when any movement was in progress.

In March, 1865, the regiment was ordered to the front, and assigned to the 3d Brigade, 1st Division, 9th Army Corps.

Immediately after the capture and recapture of Fort Stedman, they were ordered to hold the fort and lines of works to the right.

March 29 he wrote home (for the last time),—"We feel it is quite an honor to begin our life at the front in so famous a place," it being what was fitly termed one of the hottest places on the line. That night, about 10 o'clock, the enemy opened a heavy fire on the fort, which was returned with spirit, until it became general for some distance along the line. The regiment was on the alert, expecting another charge on the works. While passing along the line, anxious to see how the men, for the first time under a severe fire, behaved, a Minie ball pierced his head, and he fell dead without a struggle. It was hard, that one who had participated with honor in many of the most hotly contested battles of the war should fall in a midnight skirmish, just as the victory which he had so long fought and prayed for was within our grasp: but such is the fortune of war.

His life was almost the last one that the state sacrificed in the contest; and I believe that no braver soldier or truer patriot, among the many who went from the state, gave up his life in the cause.

On the 7th of April, when the whole land was rejoicing over the fall of Richmond and Petersburg, accompanied by a large circle of mourning relatives and friends, borne by the loving hands of classmates, he was laid in our quiet cemetery.

"'Tis little; but it looks in truth,
As if the quiet bones were blest,
Among familiar names to rest,
And in the places of his youth."

In an address of welcome to the students of Brown University who had served in the war, Prof. Angell thus alluded to his death: "And yet one more we mourn. Just as we were hoping that death had completed his roll of victims from our ranks, as the rebellion was tottering to its final downfall, the fatal bullet sped to its mark, and Major Brown was gone forever. In every battle and every skirmish he had been at his post, and at his post he fell, as complete victory was about to restore him to us and all he loved. Would you know his sweet and noble spirit? Hear what he said, with tearful eye and swelling breast, as he was about to set out for the field with a new regiment to which he had been assigned: 'I am not afraid to face death—not afraid to meet it, if need be; but what if my regiment should disgrace itself?' True-hearted soldier and Christian! A regiment with such officers as thou wast never disgraces itself."

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